

THE
Journal
 OF
Nervous and Mental Disease.

Original Articles.

THE WHITECHAPEL MURDERS: THEIR MEDICO-LEGAL AND HISTORICAL ASPECTS.¹

BY E. C. SPITZKA,

NEW YORK.

IT is when approaching the consideration of this repulsive subject that we appreciate the old writer's definition: "Man is an ape without the tail, who walks on his hind legs, is gregarious, omnivorous, restless, mendacious, thievish, salacious, pugnacious, capable of many arts, the foe of the rest of animate creation; the worst foe to his own kind."² (*Gilles de Retz*)

The original Bluebeard of history far exceeded in destructiveness the Whitechapel assassin. Like Tiberius the Roman emperor, he sacrificed hecatombs of children to his lusts, in a solitary chateau in France, whose ruins still mark the site of this horrible blot on humanity. He was of the family of the proud Montmorenci, a companion in arms of the Maid of Orleans, and in good repute as a soldier. The following extracts from his manuscript confession I cite from Julian Chevalier:³

¹ Remarks made in discussing Mr. Austin Abbott's paper on the same subject before the Society of Medical Jurisprudence, New York.

² "Simia homo sine calida pedibus posticis ambulans, gregarius, omnivorus, inquietus, mendax, froax, salax, pugnax, artium variarum capax, animalium reliquorum hostis, sui ipsis inimicus teterrimus."

³ Inversion of the Sexual Sense, quoted in *Amer. Journal of Insanity*, 1887, p. 360.

"I do not know how, but of my own self, without counsel of any one, I concluded to act thus, solely for the pleasure and luxury it afforded me. In fact I found incomparable delight in murder, doubtless by the instigation of the devil. It is eight years now since this diabolical idea came to me. One day, being by chance in the library of the castle, I found a Latin book describing the lives and customs of the Cæsars of Rome. It was written by a learned historian of the name of Suetonius. The said book was adorned with pictures very well painted, which showed how these pagan emperors lived ; and I read in this beautiful history how Tiberius, Caracalla,⁴ and other Cæsars slaughtered children, and took pleasure in torturing them. Upon this I determined to imitate the said Cæsars, and on that very evening I commenced to follow up in earnest and carry out the text and the pictures in the book. . . . I abused these children for the ardor and delectation of luxury which their sufferings caused me. Afterwards I caused them to be slain by these fellows.⁵ Sometimes I made them cut the throats of the children, severing the heads from the bodies. Sometimes I crushed their skulls by blows of a heavy stick. Sometimes I removed their limbs ; removed their entrails, hung them on iron hooks to cause them to languish, and while they were languishing in death, I had connection with them. Sometimes I did the same after they were dead. Oh, I had great pleasure in seeing the most beautiful heads of these children after they were bloodiest. . . . As to those slain, their bodies were burned in my chamber, except some very beautiful heads which I kept for relics."

In this same confession he begs the king abjectly to spare his life, and allow him to expiate his crimes by retiring to a monastery, in connection with the statement, that he had retired from the king's service, as otherwise he would have been unable to resist the same furious impulse to slay the young Dauphin of France, the son of the king (Charles VII.).

⁴ An error ; he probably meant Caligula.

⁵ Henriet and Ponton, his assistants, who were also executed.

Whether this latter statement was false and made to work on the king's feelings, it is now impossible to determine. It assuredly conflicts with his former statement that he owed his inspiration to Suetonius. The whole tone of the confession, the frequent involuntary exclamation of "beautiful," "luxury," and such like terms, when describing the revolting and horrible, indicate to my mind, that he was nothing more nor less than a degenerated voluptuary. Certainly he was not an impulsive lunatic, for he had assistants, and continued his excesses for eight years, entrapping, outraging, vivisectioning and destroying, according to his own confession, over nine hundred children of both sexes, or one every third day. I am not inclined to credit his statement about the Dauphin. If he had had the "furious impulse" at that time, who can doubt that in that age he could have gratified it over and over again on others, as he in fact did later on. It is inconsistent with what I can find in the records of similar cases that he should have had an impulse to destroy the Dauphin, without an accompanying sexual motive. It is improbable that he should reach the age of thirty-six before yielding to the impulse. It is more likely that his earlier excesses had led to a condition in which, as Shakespeare has it, "desire outliveth performance;" that he exhausted all artifices to stimulate his weakened powers; and coming across the work of Suetonius, it exercised a horrible fascination over him. No one will claim that his associates in crime were insane. But the very fact that it is more difficult to conceive how two persons could be found so brutalized and callous as to do for money or interest what de Retz did in obedience to the most powerful passion—however perverted—shows how careful we must be in allowing the horrible nature of a crime to rank as a proof of insanity. From those men to whom "the shriek of torture" of the violated virgin "is the essence of their delight," and "who would not silence by a single note the cry of agony over which they gloat," exposed in the *Pall Mall Gazette*,⁶ from the

⁶ Modern Minotaur, in "The Maiden Tribute," 1884. Fielding, in his "Jonathan Wild," speaks of one of his characters as "well knowing that there are certain dispositions so brutal that cruelty adds a great savour to their pleasures." Montaigne says: "Lust seeks stimulation in pain."

country boy who, after excessive self-abuse, developed a *penchant* for intercourse with ducks, geese and other animals, his gratification being exalted by their dying agony,—there is an unbroken chain of cases, showing how the acts of Gilles de Retz and the Whitechapel murderer may evolve on a basis of voluptuous exaltation associated with sexual failure. There is the case of the Russian physician who when sober was sexually normal, but when intoxicated could obtain gratification, accompanied by ejaculation, only as the blood flowed from wounds made with a lancet on the buttocks of his mistresses.⁷ Numbers of women found dead with evidences of violation, exhibit injuries pointing to an association of murderous, or shall I call it “wild-beast” instinct, with the libidinous motives of their destroyer. Thus Mrs. Ebenbauer was found with the vagina torn apart by fingernails and the left nipple bitten off.⁸ The body of a young girl was found in South Carolina, about 1865–1866, frightfully hacked about the vulva, and three negroes, discovered to be the perpetrators, were lynched after confession. Even the *pæderasts*, at the height of their disgusting and forced orgasm, are guilty of similar acts. Thus the “passive” *pæderast*, Richeux, had had his throat cut by his “active” partner, and the dead body was then placed in the attitude of the antique statue “Hermaphrodite.” Letellier was similarly murdered by Pascal, and Binet by another. Both victims showed extensive scrotal ecchymoses, proving that the murder had been preceded by violent manipulation of the genitals.⁹ Indeed, it is asserted that the “active” *pæderast* delights in grasping and clasping the throat of his partner. Frank,¹⁰ after carefully studying the case of a brakeman who had been committed to an asylum after having knocked down a girl, cut open her genitals to permit his entry, and failing, cut her throat “without knowing why,” decides that he was of limited intelligence

⁷Tarnowsky, *Die krankhaften Erscheinungen des Geschlechtsinnes*. Berlin, 1886, p. 61.

⁸Tardieu, *Attentats contre les meurs*. 3d edition, p. 116, German translation.

⁹Tardieu, *Op. cit.*, p. 168.

¹⁰Vierteljahrshschrift f. gerichtliche Medizin, xlvii., p. 200, 1887.

and not insane. In the case of Tirsch,¹¹ who, after a life history of insubordination, theft, and immoral attacks, animated in his fifty-fifth year by a hatred of the entire female sex because one of that sex had rejected his proffers of marriage, solicited, forced, and killed an old woman, robbing her clothes and money, and cutting off the breasts and genitals, which he boiled and ate. The subsequent history did not reveal the existence of any pronounced form of insanity, but rather an angry disposition culminating in periodical outbreaks of fury, as to whose exact nature the reporter appears to have been in doubt. In the case of a Parisian military officer, who being enamored of a woman, applied leeches to her anus and vulva, so that the flowing blood might incite his passion, sequestration was followed by furious mania, and later by dementia which continued until his death.¹² Here, as in the cases where sexual perversion and cannibalistic propensities marked the incipient development of senile or paretic dementia, the morbid nature of the act was proven by its close chronological association with marked insanity. The same cannot be said of two cases which have, I think, undeservedly been held up as reproaches to French medical jurisprudence: Menesclou and Leger. Menesclou¹³ was guillotined in 1880 at Paris, after having been pronounced of sound mind by Motet, Laségue, and Brouardel. Aged only nineteen, he had violated a girl of four, choked her, and cut the body into pieces. At the anthropological laboratory both frontal lobes, the two upper temporal, and part of the occipital gyri were alleged to have been "softened." Such extensive softening it is impossible to conceive in a young person without accompanying motor and sensory symptoms that would have placed his irresponsibility beyond a doubt. Their absence militates against the genuineness of the record. Leger at the age of twenty-four left home to seek a

¹¹ Maschka, *Prager Vierteljahrschrift*, 1886, i., p. 79.

¹² Brierre de Boismont, cited by Lunier: *Annales Medico-Psychologiques*, 1850, p. 107, from *Gazette Medicale de Paris*, July 21, 1849.

¹³ *Affaire Menesclou*, *Annales d'Hygiène publique et de médecine légale*, 1880, p. 439.

situation; instead he wandered about over a week in the woods, overcome by a desire to eat human flesh. He captured a girl aged twelve, violated her, mutilated the sexual organs, tore out the heart, ate it, drank her blood, buried the body, and denied his act when captured. He was guillotined, and Esquirol found adhesions between the pia and dura.¹⁴ Unfortunately but little of the life history of either Leger or Menesclou can be utilized in determining what relation the post-mortem findings could have had to their sexual aberrations. This brings me to the consideration of the case of a French nobleman, who wanted but the opportunities he would have had in the middle ages to have graduated into another Marshall de Retz or a Whitechapel assassin.

Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade, was born 1740. His father was distinguished as a literateur. He entered a regiment as a cadet, and was expelled on account of his immoral life. In 1772 he was sentenced to death *in contumacium* for sodomy and attempted poisoning. He evaded the death penalty by flight; but returned to France, and probably with the aid of assistants carried out a number of excesses, undiscovered, similar to the following. The strollers on one of the Parisian streets, one evening in 1777, heard groans as if from a remote apartment in a deserted house. The door having been forced, other doors were encountered which were forced in turn; and in one room a nude female was found tied down on a table and pale as death from loss of blood. There were two wounds, one at each bend of the elbow, as if made by a phlebotomist, one in each breast, and corresponding ones on the vulva. Her story was as follows: In the ordinary course of her "profession" she had been solicited by the Marquis, who invited her to sup with him and his associates. After the supper she was tied down, assured that only a little blood would be drawn, and that a surgeon, or at least one who used surgical instruments, had made the wounds in

¹⁴Georget. The cases of Leger, Feldtmann, etc. Translated into German by Amelung. Darmstadt, 1827.

question. As soon as the blood flowed freely he threw himself on his victim. She however alarmed, cried out, and the Marquis and his accomplices fled on hearing the doors forced. Otherwise it is probable the wounds would have been stanchd and the victim silenced by the means usually effective with her class. He was arrested, tried, convicted, and imprisoned in the Bastile. From here he was transferred to the asylum at Charenton for alleged insanity. In 1790 he regained his liberty, and published several prurient books.¹⁵ It was his attempt to issue a collected edition of these works which led Napoleon I. to order his rearrest and confinement in Charenton, where he died, leaving several posthumous manuscripts of a like character.

In his case neither periodical impulses, epileptiform nor vertiginous seizures existed. His perversion ran like a red thread through his entire mental organization. Yet I believe that a consideration of the case of the Roman emperors, whose example had so marked an effect on De Retz, Sade's prototype, will show that unlimited indulgence and absence of responsibility are competent to make sexual monsters out of mere voluptuaries. Tiberius after excessive normal indulgence retired to Capri, where he finally employed persons nicknamed *Spintrii* to devise modes of sexual pleasure. It is difficult to indicate in decent language the successive steps by which he reached the murderous acme. It may suffice to say that in the early part of this phase of his career an aspirant to his favors offered him the choice as a present between Parrhasius' painting of "Atalante exciting Meleager *per os*" or one million sesterces, and that Tiberius chose the former; that the performances of the "animal with three backs" was devised to stimulate his desires when they waned, the "little fish boys" when they were extinguished; and that then he entered on a course of horrible butcheries of the youth of both sexes, which served as a model to De Retz.¹⁶ Nero, after indulging in the worst

¹⁵ "Justine, ou Malheurs de la vertu," Paris, 1791; "Pauline et Belval," and "Juliette," 1798.

¹⁶ Suetonius, translated by Stahr, p. 239.

incests, dressed the emasculated Sporus as empress, and he himself acted the part which Sporus acted to him, to his "husband" Doryphorus, imitating the while the cries of a ravished virgin. He committed pæderasty with young Anulus Plantius prior to having him executed ;¹⁷ and, finally, having had men and women tied to stakes, and himself clothed in the skin of a wild beast, he threw himself on them with fierce cries to bite off their genitals." A long series of these debauches could be named, who like their *numerous* modern imitators delighted in epilating the mons veneris of their concubines.¹⁸ Epilepsy, and the form of insanity rendered popularly familiar through the case of the late King of Bavaria, were rife in the family of the Cæsars. Caligula, who had the bloodiest propensities of all, who anticipated Ludwig's architectural craze, was a true epileptic, and nothing served him better to convince him that a child he had by Cæsonia was really his than its wildness, for it bit, scratched, and tortured all other children who came near it.¹⁹ He himself cut down an assistant at the sacrifices, laughing out wildly, as he did on another occasion among his senators, when, being asked the cause of his merriment, he replied, "because a single word from me and all these throats are cut." The existence of neurotic taint in the family of the Cæsars does not prove that their sexual aberrations were necessarily due to insanity. It shows that they are more likely to assume certain guises in the insane than in the sane. Tiberius was not a lunatic nor an epileptic, and his excesses more nearly resemble those of De Retz than do those of Caligula and Domitian. As I hinted before, example, opportunity, and license operating on a mind not strong, turned by flattery, and meeting temptation at the hands of hordes of willing purveyors, will sink into loathesome luxuriousness even when not insane. Thus Elagabalus,²⁰ coming from Syria, "abandoned himself to the grossest pleasures with ungoverned fury, and soon found disgust and satiety in the midst of his enjoyments. The inflammatory powers of art were summoned to his aid ; the confused

¹⁷ *Ib.*, p. 403. ¹⁸ *Ib.*, p. 403. ¹⁹ Domitian, *Ib.*, p. 548. ²⁰ *Ib.*, p. 291.

²¹ Gibbon, "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," i, p. 100.

multitude of women, of wines, and of dishes, and the studied variety of attitude served to revive his languid appetites. . . . A long train of concubines and a rapid succession of wives, among whom was a vestal virgin ravished by force from her sacred asylum, were insufficient to satisfy the impotence of his passions. The master of the Roman world affected to copy the dress and manners of the female sex,²² . . . and dishonored the principal dignities of the empire by distributing them among his numerous *lovers*."

To come down to the case of the Whitechapel assassin, there are very few cases in the literature of the subject that nearly approximate his case. None are exactly like it. Long series of murders on women, done in the same manner and committed from evidently similar motives are on record, but they were all committed in comparatively deserted localities. Only one was continued after the murderer knew that the hue and cry had been raised and skilled measures adopted for his capture. But while he mutilated his victims in the same way as the Whitechapel unknown, Bertrand selected bodies of the dead and not the living. At Gainesville, and near Austin, Texas, ten murders, terribly similar in every detail, were committed in 1887. The first blow was with an ax, and afterwards the bodies so mutilated that they fell apart on being lifted up. The killing was uniformly done in bed, the victim was, as a rule, dragged into the yard and there hacked to pieces. Most of those destroyed were colored servants. In his tenth case he failed to complete his task, the victim escaping with her life. The perpetrator has not been discovered. The cases of Andrew Bichel²³ and Bertrand resemble the Whitechapel one in the fact that both revelled among the intestines, the former of living, the latter of dead subjects. Both describe their *pouchant* as irresistible and the delight they experienced as indescribable, and probably the Whitechapel fiend experiences the same. Bertrand had a period-

²² Like Lord Cornbury, Colonial Governor of New York, nephew of Lord Clarendon; see Spitzka : "A Historical Case of Sexual Perversion." Chicago Medical Review, Aug. 20, 1881.

²³ Feuerbach, cited by Kraft-Ebing, Arch. f. Psychiatrie, vii., p. 302.

ical fever accompanied by headache, which was relieved by his violation of sepulcher, and followed by a sense of lassitude. During his fury he bruised and lacerated his hands without feeling it. The discovery of his penchant was made by himself in the following way. A young girl having been placed in the grass, the diggers were driven away by a thunderstorm; before their return he went to the grass, and, as if at random, beat the body with a switch. This gave him such pleasure that he returned two days later, dug up that body, cut it into pieces, and reburied them. In this case, as in the others, he long denied the very feature which might have convinced his physicians that he was insane, namely, the sexual motive. He had his full consciousness during his escapades. For two years he violated bodies in various cemeteries around Paris, escaping sentinels, repeatedly fired at, dislocating an infernal machine which had been set at the place where he usually cleared the walls, but finally blown up by one, escaping, and discovered by coming to have his wounds dressed. Experts who have described his and similar cases are inclined to regard them as a case of periodical mania in the guise of necrophilism²⁴ or sexual furor. At the same time it is admitted by the best authorities—Westphal, Krafft-Ebing and Tarnowsky—that the mere existence of anthropophagy, necrophilism or sexual perversion when unaccompanied by other evidences of nervous or mental disease, is not sufficient proof of insanity. What shall we say of the prominent clergyman who has a prostitute chalked, so as to resemble a corpse, placed in a shroud on a catafalque, and the room hung in black; who then recites the offices of the dead, and when arrived at a certain point—permit me to draw the curtain²⁵ here; our record is already overloaded with bewildering horror!

It is not and cannot be disputed, that the impulse to perform murderous acts may be pondered and debated over in the mind of the assassin, obscurely (to us) associated with sexual motives and finally yielded to. The case is on

²⁴ For details see Lunier, *Ann. Med. Psychologique*, 1849, p. 351.

²⁵ *La prostitution contemporaine*, by L. Taxil, p. 171.

record²⁶ of a young man who, seized with the desire to associate sexually with and murder a woman, went with a prostitute, accomplished the first part of his purpose, but reflecting that it would be disgraceful to be reported and convicted as the murderer of a prostitute, he deferred the latter part. He then went to a restaurant, wrote and transmitted a letter to the police acknowledging that he had this impulse, and, indeed, before the authorities arrived, he stabbed one of the waitresses. On examination, it was found that he was subject to vertigo and to fainting seizures. Le Grand du Saulle and Falret pronounced him irresponsible on the ground of epilepsy. Laségue assumed the existence of periodical mania. I must admit that the history of this, as of similar cases, is defective in the exhibition of the *raison d'être* of the impulse, an admission which is unfortunately to be made with reference to many other sensational and intrinsically interesting and startling records.

If the inscription on a window-shutter, stating that he had twenty to kill and would then surrender himself, signed "Jack the Ripper," be really the writing and signature of the Whitechapel assassin, it may put an entirely different aspect on the case. If it be a genuine expression of intention it is impossible to account for it on the theory of impulsive, periodical or of epileptic insanity. It is not inconsistent with sexual perversion, that he might have written this to mislead. Indeed, it would not surprise me if this person were an acquaintance of an author of eminence, unbosomed himself to him, and thus utilized in a sensational tale. It would not be the first time that a subject of sexual perversion had entered the lists as a writer,²⁷ and no artifice that ingenuity could devise or industry execute would be too cunning for one of this class. I look upon the revelation of his identity with the highest degree of curiosity, and I am prepared to learn that, like the Texas and Westphalian assassins, he may discontinue his work and remain forever unknown. Such a mind is not immune to the influence of

²⁶ *Annales d'Hygiène publique et de Médecine légale*, 1875.

²⁷ See the cases of Numa Numantius and the Marquis de Sade.

fear and the necessity of caution, and as regards the last phase in the history of the Texas and Westphalian assassins it may remain an unsolved alternative between latency of the impulse and suicide of the assassin. Strange motives crop out among impulsive lunatics. Singular antipathies, romantic notions of revenge, pseudo-philanthropic ideas, mysterious associations of certain numbers, may all bear a part in the horrible scheme to which the Whitechapel fiend appears to have devoted himself, if paranoia be one of his mental loads. If so, we may look for peculiarities in dress, peculiarities of writing, and peculiarities of countenance in him. But whatever theory we indulge in this wide field of speculation, one prominent fact remains as the most unprecedented in the history of murderous sexual frenzy. Newly married husbands, as in the case cited by Mead, have in this state torn their wives to pieces, and been found with the bleeding entrails wound round their hands or strung about the neck of the victim. But in addition, in the Whitechapel case, the uterus was uniformly found missing, and in one case the left kidney. What did the assassin remove these for? The greater probability is that he devoured them; the lesser that he preserved them as De Retz preserved the heads of the murdered children, as the *frotteurs* of Paris preserve the handkerchiefs they steal from the women whose odor attracts them, and as the stealers of aprons, of women's shoes, and of drawers exposed on wash-lines, establish a collection of these objects. It is less likely that he removes them for some superstitious reason,²⁸

²⁸ I have seen it stated in the Newgate Calendar quoted in Lichtenberg's descriptive text of Hogarth's works, that many English murderers believed that the devouring of the heart of an innocent child would render them immune to discovery and punishment by earthly justice. In a letter received while this article is going to press, Dr. Richard Gundry of the Catonsville Asylum referring to the witch-candle superstition of the Middle Ages, cites the following startling case of this singular belief which appears to crop out at "strange times and strange places," to use my correspondent's words. He writes: "A legal friend gave me a sketch of a trial in old slavery times of an old half-witted negro for the murder of a woman after consulting a white fortune-teller, who told him that if he melted together the uterus, one ovary, half the vulva and one mamma of a white woman, then making a candle of it that it would render him invisible when he had it during his stealing excursions. He was convicted and hanged on the Eastern shore of Maryland. The fortune-teller—as the testimony of a black was not then admitted in evidence—escaped scot-free." Of this case Dr. Grundy has promised further details.

or utilizes them in the preparation of some nostrum.

I do not believe that the ten Whitechapel murders are the only acts of the kind of which the unknown has been guilty. Either he has performed similar acts on the living in deserted localities, where the cunning he has since exhibited so manifestly would aid him in obliterating every trace of his deed, or he has served an apprenticeship on the dead body, be he butcher, medical man, or amateur. It is not easy to remove the human uterus without a fair knowledge of pelvic topography, and he who endeavors to expose and remove that organ on the strength of an experience acquired among the lower animals need well be a good homologist.

Finally I would suggest that not the least probable theory is that the same hand that committed the Whitechapel murders committed the Texas murders. We can well picture the man to ourselves: of Herculean strength, of great bodily agility, a brutal jaw, a strange, weird expression of the eyes, a man who has contracted no healthy friendships, who is in his own heart as isolated from the rest of the world as the rest of mankind are repelled by him. Perhaps some other part of the world is destined to be startled by a series of similar butcheries, and his discovery and apprehension (the latter a task of great difficulty I imagine) will permit us to study with more satisfaction than in its present hypothetical condition this singular subject.

The English medical and secular journals have been strongly censured for attributing the Whitechapel murders to an American. Undoubtedly they did this on absurd grounds and in a cockney spirit; but to any one familiar with the Texas homicides of a year ago, the theory that both acts were committed by one and the same person does not seem unreasonable. At the last meeting I noticed among the audience two men who were undoubtedly cases of sexual perversion, who came to hear Mr. Abbott's paper; and there have been stranger freaks in history than would be the fact of the Whitechapel murderer sitting among us at this very moment.

We must not forget, in estimating the true nature of the

murderous impulse, that among animals such impulses are often associated with sexual life. The female mantis religiosa devours the head-piece of her mate, while the abdominal segment (apparently undisturbed) completes the marital act. Certain female spiders devour their mates *post-coitu*. Again, the gorilla—according to evolutionists, a near relative of our species—when he has disabled a foe, delights in tearing out his entrails and revelling in massacre. In the sacking of cities, infuriated soldiers have frequently been guilty of combined acts of butchery and rape. The wild beast, as stated at the opening of this article, is slumbering in us all. It is not necessary always to invoke insanity to explain its awakening.

NOTE.—Countless instances are on record, showing that bloody propensities and mutilation are apt to be directed against the sexual organs. The beasts who disgraced, and eventually aborted the French Revolution, after hacking the body of the beautiful and virtuous Princess Lamballe to pieces, mounted her head, hands, feet and vulva on pikes, and paraded these parts before the prison windows of her whom they styled Madame Veto (Marie Antoinette).